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TRAINING IN THE SCHOOLS FOR CIVIC EFFICIENCY

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Time was when a man could be a most efficient individual in his business or profession, in his church relationships, in all matters of personal concern, and at the same time be utterly inefficient or even conscienceless as a member of the body politic. Religion and politics were not to be mixed, nor were religion and business. But politics might become the handmaiden of business—especially big business! Democracy seemed to be breaking down, and most noticeably in our cities. Our reforms were spasms: our relapses were recoveries—returns to the normal order of things.

But this epoch, we believe, is slowly passing. The younger generation are learning to think straight and true in public matters, whether of city, state, or nation. They really want to be good citizens, and they are coming to see that “the test of good citizenship lies in the existence of an intelligent, continuing interest in the questions of good . . . government.” We are all learning that the supremest effort must be made to “combine efficiency with our popular sovereignty.”

The press, the pulpit, women’s clubs, civic associations, and finally the colleges,—all these and others have helped to start what promises to be a veritable tidal wave of civic interest and enlightenment. Have the schools been doing their part in this training for civic efficiency? If not, are they awake to the fact and laying plans for the future? The first question is easily answered, and with an emphatic negative which has no need of proof. The second query is as readily met, and with an affirmative the proof of which it is the purpose of this brief article to present.

Since any education which has the remotest bearing on life is an indirect preparation for the performance of civic duties, it is obvious that only direct preparation for the meeting of civic obligations is here to be considered.

Formal instruction in civics seems to have come into our schools

soon after the Civil War, in the form of a clause-by-clause memorization of the Federal Constitution, interspersed with salaries and terms of office of government officials. Probably intended at the beginning to inculcate a spirit of nationality, as opposed to states rights, in course of time it came to have no justification whatever and simply lingered on till something vital should come to take its place. In the conservative East it has had to wait for nearly half a century!

A course so lacking in interest for pupil and teacher alike, and so valueless as a means of real civic training, could hardly fail to be attacked from all sides. The National Education Association, the National Municipal League, the American Political Science Association, the American Historical Association, and the National Bureau of Education—not to mention others—have recently joined in the onslaught. And the day of deliverance is at hand for long-suffering youngsters and apathetic teachers. Fortunately, coöperation between these various organizations has been effected and much valuable time saved.

THEORY OF THE NEW CIVICS

In order that what has been worked out in this coöperative fashion may be understood, it may not be amiss to state briefly the reasoning that underlies the New Civics.

The object of teaching, generally, may be stated as twofold: first, cultural, to acquaint the child with his environment; second, practical, to train for citizenship. There are various sorts of environment, each with its corresponding field of study. Among others is that man-made, social environment which we term the community, and the study of which we call civics. The community has been well defined as a group of people in a single locality, bound together by common interests and subject to common rules or laws. And the various types of community include the home, the school, the church, the shop, the state. A citizen is anyone who participates in community action, sharing its privileges and properly subject to a share in its duties and responsibilities. The good citizen is one who manfully shoulders his obligations as a citizen and performs his part well as a member of his community. All are citizens, whether young or old, for all are members of one or more of these communities—always including the state.

Civics, then, on its cultural side is the study of that social environment we call the community; on its practical side it is a training for efficient community service and particularly in that type of community which we term the state. And this leads us to the conclusion that civics as a school subject includes both a curriculum of studies and a curriculum of activities. How far away this leads us from the old-time memory endurance test can well be imagined.

The steps in this newer sort of civic training would naturally be: first, to secure a fund of practical information about civic matters; second, to arouse interest in the problems studied; third, to stimulate to such coöperation with community agencies as the maturity and experience of the pupil enables him (or her) to offer,—for, be it remembered, the “good citizen” must be *good for something*. Equally patent, it would seem, but so long overlooked in the teaching of civics, is the method of approach. From the near to the remote, from the simple to the complex, from the concrete to the abstract, from function to structure, from local to state and national, from matters of current interest to those of origin and growth,—how else than by this method—at once scientific and “commonsensible”—can the live interest of the boy and girl be roused and their wills be strengthened to lend a hand wherever they can? And this making of good-for-something citizens—of city, state, and nation—is the final goal of the New Civics.

A PRACTICAL PROGRAM FOR THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

And now for a practical program of civic education for our young citizens. As it is developing over the country for the elementary schools, this program is one in aim and in point of view; while in method and in detail two main types are emerging, to one or the other of which all others are likely to conform—until such time as the two plans shall be happily blended.

The first of these methods, splendidly exemplified by Indianapolis, one of the pioneer cities in genuine civic training, makes no attempt to teach civics as a separate subject before the last year of the grammar school. It depends, rather, upon so correlating the various studies—including not only geography and history, but even arithmetic—that all alike shall contribute their share to the civic education of the young person.

The second method, just going into operation in Philadelphia,

does not hesitate to label its civic instruction as such, throughout all the eight years of the elementary school. It deliberately takes for its own the distinctively civic content to be found in any of the other subjects of the elementary curriculum, and builds up a unified structure.

A most interesting account of the former plan, written by Mr. Arthur W. Dunn, one of its authors, may be found in *Bulletin No. 17, 1915, United States Bureau of Education*. The writer of this paper takes the liberty of giving an outline sketch of the latter plan, with which he is more familiar since he has helped to formulate it.

In the early grades the fundamental civic virtues,—obedience, helpfulness, courtesy, punctuality, and the like,—are inculcated by the use of stories, songs, games, memory gems and dramatization. The aim is threefold: to establish right habits of thought and action in the children; to project these habits into the home and into their other relationships as well; to show the pupils how all community life is based on the embodiment of these virtues in each member of society.

Later, the pupil is brought in touch with a wider community than his home and his school, and now he learns of the services that are being rendered in a personal way to each family represented in the class, by the milkman, the grocer, the baker, the plumber, the doctor, the dressmaker, and others. Then follow the services rendered by corporate agencies, such as the policeman, the fireman, the street-sweeper, the garbage-collector, the ashes-collector; by the trolley car, the telephone, the water supply, gas and electricity, the sewage system, etc. The civic virtues considered in the earlier grades are here seen to be exemplified to a marked degree, and the reciprocal duties and obligations resting upon the young citizens of the class toward those who render these community services are practically emphasized. Accessible educational and other public institutions are visited and reported upon,—not even forgetting the places for suitable amusement and recreation.

Next follows a year devoted to the city as an industrial unit. The great industries (manufacturing and commercial) which have helped make the city famous are first considered, and visits are made to these plants whenever practicable. The various occupations which may be followed by young people, and even by older ones, are then discussed, using simple descriptive “write-ups” and other

illustrative material. The superior economic position to be gained by those who remain longer in school is especially made plain, both as to initial wage and as to chances of advancement.

The work of the last two years is based on an attempt to see how the various elements of community welfare—such as health, protection of life and property, education, recreation, civic beauty, communication, transportation, wealth—are secured through various public and private agencies. This necessitates a practical insight into the functions performed by various governmental departments, bureaus or commissions, aided by numerous private associations and committees. As a final round-up, the organization and functions of government are re-surveyed in such manner as to differentiate clearly between city, state, and nation.

Throughout all the later years of the elementary school any textbook that may be used is supplemented by trips to see the various agencies at work, followed by reports and class discussions. And gradually a civics laboratory is being evolved, including laws and ordinances, reports, plans and charts, maps, models, and even samples of all sorts, along with photographs, lantern slides and other illustrative material.

It will be recalled that "the shop" (industry) has been mentioned in this paper as one of the types of community of which young people may expect, sooner or later, to become members; and that, accordingly, they should prepare to perform their part well as members of this particular community. From this it follows that a brief vocational survey, of a more advanced type than that already described, must soon be included in this course of study. It will be designed to continue the practical occupational guidance begun in earlier years, so that a fair notion may be gained of what lies ahead of those who leave at this time and of the greater industrial possibilities in store for those who go on and complete a high school course. Moreover, as a sort of by-product, the boys and girls should acquire a profound respect for intelligent hard work, no matter what the trade or profession followed, and a contempt only for laziness and inefficiency.

But this "vocational survey" will do more than that, if it fulfills its highest function. It will stamp upon the impressionable minds of these rapidly maturing young persons the fundamental civic concept that the good citizen in the completest sense is one

who does not allow himself to become so engrossed in the process of making a living as to lose sight of those other duties of good citizenship that he owes to family and friends, to society generally, and above all to the state.

The conclusion has already been arrived at that civics should include both a curriculum of studies and a curriculum of activities. As a part of the latter, the following are evolving naturally from the course itself: student self-government in the class and even in the school, at least for certain definite purposes; the formation of voluntary junior civic leagues, whose activities may extend from thoughtful care in the home and school and on the street to the extermination of moths and flies, or even to the cultivation or beautification of vacant lots; coöperation with civic organizations and with governmental agencies.

THE TEST OF EFFICIENCY

The aim of early civic training, no matter what the locality or the method pursued, is clear and definite: to make intelligent, interested, practical citizens, who will know what good government is and how to coöperate with public officials to get it. Unless, as Mr. Dunn has well said, the young person's interest shall have been aroused in civic matters, with corresponding motives for participation in community life; unless, further, a certain degree of civic initiative and judgment shall have been cultivated in the boy and girl, these years of effort will have been largely wasted.

This newer type of civic training, unfortunately, has not yet been in operation long enough for one to speak over-confidently in justification of so radical a departure from the old order; nor is anyone claiming that a panacea has been found for all the ills of the body politic. But the sponsors for the new civics are willing to abide by the results, as they shall appear in the actual civic life of the boys and girls who grow up under its influence.

Now a few words as to the sort of civic education that is already being worked out for the secondary school. Here, as in the elementary school, civics (known familiarly as civil government) has long been a sort of "poor relation" to history, and accorded the sort of treatment that such kinsfolk are traditionally held to receive. If taught at all it was usually in the third or fourth year, along with United States history, and was often little more than a rehash of

the grammar school civics in a more mature form. Obviously, this sort of stuff was not even intended to set pupils to thinking—only to additional memorizing. No adequate gripping of social phenomena, no thought of trying to comprehend even the simpler social problems of the day or the attempts at their solution, not even a determination to understand in a vital and comprehensive way the very Constitution that was usually made the basis of study! No wonder it was often regarded by the teacher as so much wasted time, filched from history.

But this poor relative is to be richly endowed, her very name is to be changed from “civics” or “civil government” to “social science,” and she is to be accorded the place of honor at the educational board—an entire year, and preferably the closing one of the high school course. Will she be worthy of her new honors?

Without entering into details, which, indeed, are not yet agreed upon, it will suffice to say that this culminating year of social science will include the elements of social theory—economic, political, sociological—with constant illustration and application to the concrete problems of life. All the practical civics and the socialized history that the school has found time for must be drawn upon as a basis, no matter what the method of approach that shall finally be adopted.

The main purpose here is to help the young person to determine the mutual relationships of the social forces and events he has been observing throughout his school days. The nature of the state, of government, of law; representative types of government, with the strength and weakness of each; the objects and functions of government; social organization, social leadership, social control,—all these and other fundamental concepts, both political and economic, can be touched upon in a way that shall be interesting and vital to any normal eighteen-year-old boy or girl.

Carefully selected readings from various authorities may be safely assigned for report and class discussion, so long as care is taken that the reading and thinking of the pupils are constantly put to the test of practical experience and observation. It must be remembered that the object is to stimulate in our young citizens of this great Democracy the ability and the desire to analyze familiar social phenomena, to understand their social environment. It may be thought that this is a rather ambitious program for the secondary

school to attempt; but, after all, it is simply the culmination of the years of observing and thinking that have been going on throughout the school life, provided those years have been rich in the studies which train the powers of observation and demand a fair modicum of close, consecutive thinking.

This brief paper makes no claim of exhausting the subject of training for civic efficiency. It merely outlines one of the paths that the schools of tomorrow are going to follow, along with all the other agencies that make for civic education and civic righteousness.